

THE TIMES.

D. F. OWENS, Editor and Publisher.

DODGE CITY, KANSAS.

UNDER A CLOUD;

—OR—
CLEARING HIMSELF.

The Thrilling and Absorbing Story
of a Great Crime.

BY JENNIE DAVIS BURTON,
Author of "Her Life's Secret," and
Other Stories.

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CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

He felt stiff and sore when he arose next morning, but he was on hand at the police court, as were also Lyman Childer and Hiram Ingot, when the burglar was brought in. The latter, answering to the name of Abraham Stone, put in a plea of not guilty to the charge of house-breaking preferred against him, and was remanded for trial, the judge fixing his bail at one thousand dollars.

"In lieu of which you will be locked up until the time of your trial, which will take place a week from to-day. Deputy, remove the prisoner."

A well-known lawyer, of not too savory a reputation, here came forward and addressed the judge:

"Your honor, I am here to offer bail for the prisoner."

"I must have good names," said his honor, crossly, but the man of law smiled serenely as he produced a plottish pocket-book.

"I am ready to deposit the collateral."

"It satisfies me, and we'll hope that whoever is back of you takes \$1,000 worth of interest in this fellow. My word for it, he'll never show up again."

And the event proved that his honor was right. Long before the day of trial came around he was hunted in vain, for that \$1,000 was identified as among the cash stolen from the express company on the night our story opens.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENING AT THE EVERLEIGHS.

As may be supposed, there was a good deal of excitement over the discovery of this fact regarding the stolen money, and the boldness to which it had been put; and, strangely enough, one person who took a great interest in the matter was Althea Everleigh.

She had reason for so doing, since two of her friends were connected with that robbery in different ways.

Miss Everleigh read the papers, and knew what all had been said of Lyman Childer's loss, and the lowering cloud which threatened Norris Bergman's fair fame—for the papers had not been slow to intimate that there had been reasons beyond those given for his discharge by the express company.

The interest which she had always felt in that friend of her childhood revived after her party night, and when she saw him on the sidewalk one day as she was taking her afternoon drive, a week or so later, she spoke to the coachman, who drew up close to the curb, while she leaned out and beckoned to him.

"You have been very remiss, sir, in neglecting to pay me a party call, but it seems that I may as well get into the habit of forgetting you. If you are not busy, let me give you a turn on the avenue. Now, don't refuse, Norris, for I really want to talk to you."

To refuse after that would have been ungracious; and besides, Norris felt that the diversion of a drive in that pleasant company would really do him good.

For the last week he had been worried, nettled and thoroughly perplexed. To have one of those robbers safely caught, and then to let him go again, was in itself enough to vex him, and he was less clear in his mind after that circumstance about some things which he had settled for himself before.

He had convinced himself that Hiram Ingot was the partner of Lyman Childer's package—a package which the latter now declared of comparatively no account—and here was one of the other party attempting to commit a second robbery in Lyman Childer's house. Had the first attempt, then, fallen short of its object? Was there an understanding between the thieves whose projects had seemed separate and distinct?

In addition to the mental disquiet and the bruises he carried, he had taken a cold which confined him for several days to his lodgings, and he had grown morbid and low spirited to a degree quite unknown to him usually.

Miss Everleigh's quick eyes noticed the difference, though she did not openly remark it.

"Papa is much better, thank you," she answered his question. "I think now that it was more mental than physical trouble with him. He is not so fit for the worries of business as he once was, therefore I am glad to tell you that he is about taking in a younger partner. He has a great deal of confidence in Mr. Childer's abilities, and says that young blood will put new energy into the business, which has been flagging of late."

"Lyman Childer, do you mean?"

"Yes, the present cashier. He has come into money lately, which he is putting in, Norris, do you know, I have just learned that the money was *stolen*!" Papa has confessed to me that he is very much embarrassed, but this will make him all right. I never could have forgiven myself if he had failed or any thing of that sort."

"There is nothing to blame yourself for, Althea. You did not suspect."

"No, but I have been very extravagant and very thoughtless. I intend to mend my ways from this time out. I have set about learning housekeeping already. Come and take dinner with us to-morrow, and tell me what you think of my progress. Mr. Childer and his sister are here, too."

There was both bitter and sweet in her information for Norris. The barrier was there between Carol and himself; here was



THE NEXT INSTANT THEY HURLED THEMSELVES UPON HIM.

his chance to see her again—a chance which he felt he ought to resist, and yet before he left Miss Everleigh, he had promised to be on hand on the morrow.

"Norris," she said, at parting, "will you let me ask the new firm to give you a place in the bank? You look worried, I am sure you will be better at work."

"Not yet, thank you, Althea. It is two

years since I have had a vacation. I am in no hurry to end this one."

She understood, however, that he was waiting for the breath of suspicion to pass by.

That next evening—would he ever forget it—was a happy breathing space between the perplexities of the past and the further perplexities which the future was to bring.

Neither Lyman nor Carol had expected to see him there. A frown darkened the brow of the former; the rosy tinge deepened in the latter's cheeks.

Carol noticed that he seemed thinner, and thought he looked ill. She was afraid he would think they were selfish, never going to see how he was after that dreadful night. This between the fish and the fowl, and Norris was repaid for more than a week's suffering. Now, there had been such a thought in his mind, but the last atom of resentment melted away under the glance of those bright eyes.

Yet when the little company returned to the parlor, he found himself talking to Althea, without making an attempt to monopolize the lady of his love. It was enough to watch her, to listen as she chatted to Mr. Everleigh, free and fearless and bright as a bird in springtime—some callers dropped in, a young and lovely girl to whom care and trouble are yet unknown.

"Do you think I am very silly?" she asked, with a smile, as she looked at her elderly entertainer. "You see, it is such a new sensation to me. I never went out much before, and indeed, I am more glad for Lyman than myself—about the money, I mean—though it may have turned my head a little, becoming independent so suddenly. And Lyman says it is not so bad yet how much we are worth. He takes it quietly enough, but to me it is like a fairy tale where the people live happily forever after."

"You have made others happy—you and your brother," said Mr. Everleigh, with feeling. "Heaven bless you, my child, for your generous heart."

"He will never do anything to thwart Lyman, I am sure," thought she, and wondered that her brother did not take the place by Althea's side when Norris left it vacant, but there were no more *leaves* that night. Some callers dropped in, to whom Miss Everleigh introduced her invited guests; the conversation became general, and at ten o'clock the Childers departed.

Norris lingered but a few moments longer, and Althea went to the door with him, detaching him a moment to say:

"Come again—come often. I want you to."

She had given him her hand; with a swift pressure, she withdrew it and disappeared, leaving the young man a little startled at her suddenness. The next moment he smiled. Miss Everleigh might be changing her ways, but she was not rid of her old imperiousness yet. That "I want you to" was meant to leave him no choice.

He had nearly reached his boarding-place, and was crossing the mouth of a black alley which opened into the wider street, when two men standing within it nudged each other with the whisper: "That's him!"

The next instant they hurled themselves upon him; his throat was seized by strong, murderous fingers that choked the cry he tried to utter, and a wicked, uplifted blade caught a gleam even in that darkness before his starting, pain-dimmed eyes. He threw up his arm, and it caught the descending blow; before it could be repeated there was a sound of rapid steps, and a man came running into the alley.

"Hello, what's this! Some mischief, I'll be bound! Hey, police! Here, police!" and he raised such an alarm that the two ruffians abandoned their victim and took to their heels.

"What's the row! Speak, can't you! You'd have got the worst of that racket if I hadn't happened along. Bless if I don't think the cove has been plugged as it is. Let's see!"

The newcomer fumbled in his vest pocket for matches and lit one, shading the flame with his hand. Norris leaned against the wall, too weak and unnerved for the moment to either speak or move. The light flared up and traveled over him, dropped and was extinguished. There was genuine dismay in the voices which exclaimed:

"Hanged if it ain't Bergman!"

To the disconcerted imagination of the young man it seemed as if there were disappointment in it also—as if Hiram Ingot would not have been so ready to interfere had he known the person he was rescuing.

CHAPTER IX.

BUSINESS AND PLEASURE.

"Well, this is a pretty good. Seems to me you have the luck of getting into scrimmages. Hurt! Take my arm and I'll help you home. I've just been there to make a friendly call on you, but got tired waiting and was coming away when I heard the rumble. Bless if it don't seem as if Providence was setting me to keep a sort of a watch over you, so hang fast to your guardian angel, my boy—you're doing pretty well—and now, here we are!"

The police had not responded to the call for them, and there was nothing for Norris to do but to accept the aid proffered him. His handily opened the door, and started back at seeing his white face. She cast a quick, suspicious glance at his companion, and uttered a scream as Norris recoiled and sank into one of the hall chairs, his head falling back.

"Stop that and bring me some water," ordered Ingot, sharply. He fumbled for his own pocket-flask and put it to the young man's lips. By the time Mrs. Bates got back with the water Norris was showing signs of returning consciousness; in a moment more he was sat up.

"It's the loss of blood, I suppose," he said, faintly.

"Bleeding? Why, so you are. This coat sleeve is soaked. Scissors," to the landlady, "cut away one to send for a doctor! Oh, you can telephone. Well, that's better. I'll manage to stop the bleeding a little till he gets here."

He applied a figure above the wound, drew it tight, and afterward helped the young man up to his room.

"I wouldn't advise you to move more than is necessary," said he, "but you may as well get there one time as another. I wonder the rascals wasted that cut on your arm; 'spose you were able to help yourself a little, though?"

"Yes, it was aimed at my heart. They meant to finish me."

"Pshaw, now! What for, do you suppose? Robbery?"

"I do not know. I have not had time to think. It was certainly not worth their while if that was their object."

"Well, don't talk," cautioned Ingot, but Norris was bent upon ascertaining all the facts. His pocket-book was gone; his watch, an inexpensive silver one, was safe in his pocket; his necktie was torn and the pin missing.

"We go regularly through you when I frightened them off," observed Ingot, at this summing up. "Here is your doctor. I'll just wait for what he says, and then take myself off."

He was as good as his word, after rendering some assistance to the physician in dressing the wound. Afterward, Norris was given a composing draught and left in the charge of Mrs. Bates, but some worrying thought had come to keep sleep from his eyes.

"Did that gentleman wait long, Mrs. Bates?"

"Yes, sir. Two hours, quite. That Sally showed him up, and I never knewed it till he was going out. I just run up then to see as all your things was safe, not knowing what he might be, and give me such a turn to see him come in afterward with you that way."

"He was here in my room?"

"Yes, sir, which I told Sally she never oughter to, but he asked to come right up, and she let him. He said that they were the worst of one's life, Mr. Bergman, that's sure."

What had Hiram Ingot been doing in his room for two hours, Norris wondered, as he

lay with his eyes closed. He could not get over the impression that there was something sinister hidden beneath this would-be friendliness of the book-keeper. He was glad he had been carrying that fugitive scrap of paper in his pocket-book, which had been stolen from him. He was willing to bear his own loss, which was not great, rather than it should fall in the hands of one whom he felt to be a secret enemy of the Childers.

He was restless and feverish the next day, and though he rose and dressed with the assistance of the chore-boy, he was glad enough to take to a lounge, where he put in two or three days of such misery as men experience when kept indoors, without being so desperately ill as to take their thoughts from outdoor things.

Uncle Amos came, determined to carry him home to the cottage, and was only deterred by the doctor's declaration that he was better off without a change.

As Norris persisted that he was in no need of nursing beyond the care he got from Mrs. Bates, the elder Bergman came and went daily until his nephew began to mend. There had been something on Uncle Amos' mind meanwhile, but now he got it off.

"Didn't I say you would get on the right track? Have you any more confidence now in the future I have marked out for you, Norris? I don't despair of seeing you as high as Pinkerton yet. This attack shows that you have made progress, at any rate."

"In what way, Uncle Amos?"

"By making the rascals so afraid of you that they're willing to run the risk of an attempt to put you out of the way. Of course, it was the express robbers who made the assault on you. They know you're on their track; they have made up their

mind that you're a dangerous enemy, so that they're not apt to try it over again, for they know that this will put you on your guard. You're not as keen as I think you are. If you don't follow this business up and make it a step toward unraveling that mystery."

His uncle's view of the case did not seem wholly improbable to Norris after he had turned it over in his mind. Though his part in apprehending Abraham Stone had come about through accident, it might seem to the gang to have been the result of successful espionage. This would be probable if there was collusion between them and Ingot. Norris was inclined to think that the latter had played a part when he came upon the scene with the policeman that night; he had gone the length of imagining that Ingot might have been Stone's companion, on the lookout for "papers," while the coarser ruffian covered his movements by stripping the house of its valuables.

Against this was the fact that there was certainly no collusion between the men who had attempted his life and the book-keeper.

Thinking of it made his head ache, and he turned his face to the wall, trying to put the whole matter out of his mind. He dropped into a dreamland sleep, in which the murderous ruffian appeared wearing Lyman Childer's face, while Ingot held back the arm with which he was trying to strike.

A rustic of silken garments in the room and the sound of voices aroused him. He started up to see Carol Childer stand smiling near him, while a fragrant rose which had just dropped from her little gloved hand lay upon his pillow.

"How do you do, Mr. Bergman?" she said. "You see we have taken you by storm."

Miss Everleigh was just behind her.

"I had sent the carriage to bring Carol to pass the afternoon with me, when your uncle called and told us of the accident which had befallen you. I felt that I would have to come right off and see your condition for myself. Are you really better, Norris? Don't let us disturb you. Why, what a high pulse you have," taking his wrist between her dainty fingers.

"Then it must be through the pleasure of seeing you, for I assure you I am not half the invalid they try to make out. I'll be around again in a day or two."

"You must keep away from dark alleys and avoid late walks, if it is only for my sake, Norris. Remember, you are the only approach to a brother I have ever had. I am too selfish to lose you since you appear to have come at last to the idea that you owe something in the way of attention and companionship. I intend to increase the debt if I can."

"You are very kind, Althea."

"I intend to be kind to you," said Althea, with a gentle smile, softening her brilliant beauty, and then she began talking about his injury. Would the arm be all right when the cut healed, and was it a fact that those terrible train robbers had taken this plan to wreak their revenge on you?

Carol was very little, but her soft looks were full of compassion, and she gave him her hand as they were going away, hoping he would soon be well again. Althea turned at the door for a last word.

"I am going to see your doctor, Norris, and the moment I have his authority, the carriage shall come for you. I shall have you to stay with us for a week, or you will be exasperating yourself too soon."

Then a wave of color flamed up into her face; she stood still, as if a voice on the outside made itself heard, with disappointment and unpleasant surprise in it.

"Carol Childer! What on earth are you doing here?"

Before Carol could answer, Miss Everleigh stepped over the threshold.

"Your sister is in no way to blame for coming. Mr. Childer brought her with me. Good-bye, Norris," glancing back. "I will call again soon."

"Oh, I am glad you have come to call on Mr. Bergman, Lyman," exclaimed Carol, brightly. "It has seemed so selfish in us never to ask for him after all he did for us. You are going in, are you not?"

"After I see you ladies to the carriage." Then, as Carol ran down the narrow stairway in advance, "Miss Everleigh, have I offended you?"

She gave him a quick glance and smile.

"The offense is forgiven if you have come to make amends."

Lyman Childer sunk his teeth into his lip. She had observed his dislike for her friend, and resented it. If he had come with the intention of calling upon Bergman, he changed his mind. He stood until the carriage disappeared, then, pulling his hat down and turning his collar up, he walked rapidly away, turning into the narrow streets which led toward the river.

He seemed in some way to be the locality in which he found himself, casting sharp glances about him, until he came to a low restaurant which had a bar-room attached. This he entered, looking over the room which was half filled with a rough class of customers. He seemed to be at the table at the side, and seating himself gave an order as an excuse for being there, apparently, for he did not touch the refreshments that were brought.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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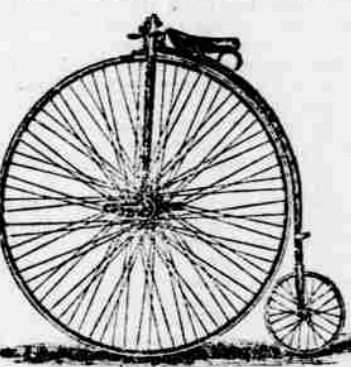
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